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I, JANENE PEISKER, TEAM LEADER EXAMINATION SUPPORT AND SALES hereby certify that annexed is a true copy of the Provisional specification in connection with Application No. 2004902102 for a patent by AINSWORTH GAME TECHNOLOGY LIMITED as filed on 20 April 2004.

WITNESS my hand this
Thirty-first day of March 2005

JANENE PEISKER
TEAM LEADER EXAMINATION
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AUSTRALIA

PATENTS ACT 1990

PROVISIONAL SPECIFICATION

FOR THE INVENTION ENTITLED:-

"GAMING MACHINE"

The invention is described in the following statement:-

GAMING MACHINE

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to gaming machines. The invention has been developed primarily in relation to computerised gaming machines and will be described herein with reference to that application. However, it should be understood that the invention is not limited to that particular field of use and may be suitable for other applications, such as gaming facilitated by the internet.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Any discussion of the prior art throughout the specification should in no way be considered as an admission that such prior art is widely known or forms part of common general knowledge in the field.

Gaming machines have long been known and are now one of the most common forms of gambling. Usually gaming machines simulate a well-known game of chance. One of the oldest and best known forms of gaming machine is the rotating reel type "poker machine". In light of its popularity, the present invention will be described with reference to this type of gaming machine. However, it will be appreciated that the invention is equally applicable to gaming machines other than the rotating reel type.

Traditional poker machines use a series of three or more reels, each reel having symbols on its peripheral edge. The reels are rotated upon the placement of a bet and then stopped to produce an arrangement of randomly selected symbols. Winnings are paid if the random selection of symbols matches one of the predetermined winning combinations. More recently, these gaming machines have been computerised with a video screen replacing the physically rotating reels. The display screen typically presents an array of symbols and five columns and three rows equating to the symbols that would normally be seen on the five physically rotating reels of an old-style mechanical machine.

Gaming machines can "pay winnings" in a variety of ways. These include dispensing money, dispensing tokens that can be redeemed for money, or simply adding credits to a credit meter that can be used for placing future bets or redeemed as money. Given the predominance of computerised gaming machines, winnings are most

5   commonly paid in the form of credits tallied on a credit meter. However, those skilled in the art will readily understand that the term encompasses other payment mechanisms.

Computerised machines have allowed players to simultaneously bet on the combination of symbols appearing in many different parts of the array. These parts of the array are referred to as "paylines" and consist of lines of adjacent symbols extending

10   through the array. The symbols may be laterally or diagonally adjacent each other so that the paylines can extend along each row and various angled or "zigzag" lines through the array. Most computerised gaming machines will offer at least five paylines in a five-reel array, which makes the gaming experience significantly more exciting than the old-style mechanical machines which traditionally had a single payline through the middle

15   row of symbols.

Eventually, machines offered all the practical paylines in the five-column three-row array. Players come to expect machines to offer multiple paylines and game designers were forced to incorporate additional aspects of interest in order to attract players.

20   As part of this ongoing effort to maintain player interest, many machines now offer secondary or "feature" games. The feature appears upon some trigger event such as predetermined outcome in a primary or "base" game. The feature can be used to provide the player with relatively large winnings and thereby provides a strong incentive to continue playing the machine. As various different types of feature have been

25   devised, several have proven to be particularly effective and popular. Different versions are incorporated into many of the machines available today.

One disadvantage associated with gaming machines which have feature games is that triggering the feature game may require many attempts. Consequently, a player may expend a significant amount of time and money before triggering the feature game.

30   Furthermore, if a player cannot trigger the feature in a reasonable amount of time this may result in the player becoming frustrated or disinterested.

It is an object of the present invention to overcome or ameliorate at least one of the disadvantages of the prior art, or to provide a useful alternative.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to a first aspect of the invention there is provided a gaming machine including:

a base game of chance having random outcomes which include predetermined winning outcomes, said machine configured to pay winnings upon the occurrence of any of the winning outcomes; wherein said machine is further configured to provide a feature game which can be triggered by a player at any time of their choosing.

According to a second aspect of the invention there is provided a method of operating a gaming machine, the method including the steps of:

providing a base game of chance having random outcomes which include predetermined winning outcomes, paying winnings on the occurrence of any of the winning outcomes; and

providing a feature game which can be triggered by a player at any time of their choosing.

According to a third aspect of the invention there is provided a gaming machine including:

a base game of chance having random outcomes which include predetermined winning outcomes, such that the machine pays winnings upon the occurrence of any of the winning outcomes; wherein said machine is further configured to provide a feature game which can be triggered by a player at any time of their choosing during a specified time period defining a window of opportunity.

According to a fourth aspect of the invention there is provided a method of operating a gaming machine, the method including the steps of:

providing a base game of chance having random outcomes which include predetermined winning outcomes, paying winnings on the occurrence of any of the winning outcomes; and

providing a feature game which can be triggered by a player at any time of their choosing during a specified time period defining a window of opportunity.

Preferably, the time period is triggered at random or in the event of a predetermined winning combination occurring during the base game. Varying levels of windows of opportunity preferably exist with higher levels being perceived as returning increased winnings.

5   More preferably, feature qualifying attributes are accumulated during play of the base game and accumulation of particular attributes will result in opening the window of opportunity such that a player may choose to trigger the feature game.

The attributes are preferably accumulated at random, in the event of the base game being played a predetermined number of times or during play of the base game on 10   the occurrence of predetermined combinations.

In a preferred form of the invention, feature attributes may be removed from a player's tally once they have been used to trigger the feature game. This removal may occur at random, on the occurrence of a predetermined combination during play of the base game or in the event of the base game being played a predetermined number of 15   times since the previous feature game was played.

Preferably, the characteristics of the feature game are dependent on the accumulation of specific feature attributes which may result in the player receiving free games, win multipliers during free games, win multipliers for specific combinations including wins with substitutes symbols appearing, bonus prizes, held reels, bonus reels, 20   bonus scatter symbols, bonus substitute symbols and bonus trigger combinations for further feature attributes.

According to a fifth aspect of the invention there is provided a gaming machine including:

a base game of chance having random outcomes which include predetermined 25   winning outcomes, such that the machine pays winnings upon the occurrence of any of the winning outcomes; wherein said machine is further configured to provide a jackpot feature game which can be triggered by a player upon the accumulation of a predetermined number of jackpot qualifying features.

According to a sixth aspect of the invention there is provided a method of 30   operating a gaming machine, the method including the steps of:

providing a base game of chance having random outcomes which include predetermined winning outcomes, paying winnings on the occurrence of any of the winning outcomes; and

providing a jackpot feature game which can be triggered by a player upon the accumulation of a predetermined number of jackpot qualifying features.

Preferably, a player can accumulate jackpot qualifying features during play of the base game. These may be accumulated at random, in the event of said base game being played a predetermined number of times or during play of said base game on the occurrence of predetermined combinations.

More preferably, when a player triggers the jackpot feature game, player interaction may be required to win the jackpot. If player interaction is required, a secondary jackpot screen will appear in order to facilitate this.

The jackpot is preferably contributed from a stand-alone machine or from a number of machines networked together.

In a particularly preferred form, the base game is a spinning reel type using a simulation of five adjacent wheels to present an array of randomly selected symbols in five columns and three rows.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Preferred embodiments of the invention will now be described, by way of example only, with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Figure 1 is a perspective view of a stand-alone gaming machine of the type suitable for the present invention; and

Figure 2 is a schematic representation of the gaming machine display showing a variety of arrays and paylines.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Referring to Figure 1, the gaming machine 1 has a video display screen 2 and control console 3. The control console 3 includes coin slot 5 for inserting coins or

tokens, a bank note slot 19, and a coin collection tray 6 for redeeming any winnings or unused coins or tokens. The console 3 also includes control buttons 4 for the player to select the number of paylines on which to bet, and, the number of credits they wish to bet on each payline.

5   The base game is a standard set of five reels, which present a five-column three-row array 7 of randomly selected symbols. The array 7 has seven paylines, 1-1 to 7-7 on which the player can place a bet. The payline icons 8 are placed on either side of the array 7 to more clearly indicate the configuration of each payline. However, many variations of arrays and paylines may also be used.

10   Any paylines carrying a bet and showing one of the predetermined winning combinations of symbols is a winning payline and credits are added to the player's credit meter (not shown).

         In one embodiment, the gaming machine and method of playing the machine includes a base game of chance usually having random outcomes which include predetermined winning outcomes, such that the machine pays winnings upon the
15   occurrence of any of the winning outcomes. The gaming machine is further configured to provide a feature game which can be triggered by a player at any time of their choosing.

         In another embodiment, the gaming machine and method of playing the machine includes a base game of chance having random outcomes which include predetermined
20   winning outcomes, such that the machine pays winnings upon the occurrence of any of the winning outcomes. The gaming machine is further configured to provide a feature game which can be triggered by the player at any time of their choosing during a specified time period which defines a window of opportunity.

25   The time period during which the window of opportunity is opened may be triggered by various methods including at random or in the event of a predetermined winning combination occurring during play of the base game. There may also be varying levels of windows of opportunity in which higher levels may be perceived by a player as returning increased winnings.

The window of opportunity may be opened by collecting feature qualifying attributes during play of the base game. Once the player has accumulated the required amount or type of feature qualifying attributes, this will result in an opportunity for the player to trigger the feature game. These attributes may be accumulated in a variety of ways including at random, the base game being played a predetermined number of times or on the occurrence of predetermined combinations during play of the base game.

Once player has used some or all of their feature attributes to trigger the feature game, the spent attributes may be subsequently removed from the player's tally. The removal of the attributes may occur at random or on the occurrence of a predetermined combination during play of the base game. Feature attributes may also be removed if the base game has been played a predetermined number of times since the previous feature game was played.

When a player triggers the feature game, the characteristics of that game may be dependent on the accumulation of specific feature attributes. For example accumulation of specific attributes may result in a feature game which provides free games, multipliers during free games, winning multipliers for specific combinations including wins with substitute symbols appearing, bonus prizes, held reels, bonus reels, bonus scatter symbols, bonus substitute symbols or bonus trigger combinations to accumulate further feature attributes.

In a further embodiment, the gaming machine and method of playing the machine includes a base game of chance having random outcomes which include predetermined winning outcomes in which the machine pays winnings upon the occurrence of any of the winning outcomes. The gaming machine is further configured to provide a jackpot feature game which can be triggered by a player upon the accumulation of a predetermined number of jackpot qualifying features.

A player can accumulate jackpot features during play of the base game. These features may be accumulated in a variety of ways including at random, on the occurrence of predetermined combinations during the base game or in the event of the base game being played a predetermined number of times.

If the jackpot game is triggered, player interaction may be required to determine if the jackpot is won. If player interaction is required, on triggering the jackpot game a secondary screen will appear in order to facilitate this. The prize for the jackpot may be contributed by a standalone machine or a number of machines networked together.

5   The present invention has been described herein by way of example only. Ordinary workers in this field will readily recognise many variations and modifications which do not depart from the spirit and scope of the broad inventive concept.

THE CLAIMS DEFINING THE INVENTION ARE AS FOLLOWS:-

1.   A gaming machine including:

a base game of chance having random outcomes which include predetermined winning outcomes, said machine configured to pay winnings upon the occurrence of any of the winning outcomes; wherein said machine is further configured to provide a feature game which can be triggered by a player at any time of their choosing.

2.   A gaming machine including:

a base game of chance having random outcomes which include predetermined winning outcomes, such that the machine pays winnings upon the occurrence of any of the winning outcomes; wherein said machine is further configured to provide a feature game which can be triggered by a player at any time of their choosing during a specified time period defining a window of opportunity.

3.   A gaming machine according to claim 2 wherein said time period is triggered at random.

4.   A gaming machine according to claim 2 wherein said time period is triggered by a predetermined winning combination occurring during the play of said base game.

5.   A gaming machine according to any one of claims 2 to 4 wherein varying levels of said window of opportunity exist such that higher levels are perceived as returning increased winnings.

6.   A gaming machine according to any one of claims 2 to 5 wherein feature qualifying attributes are accumulated during play of said base game.

7.   A gaming machine according to claim 6 wherein accumulation of particular attributes will result in opening said window of opportunity such that a player may choose to trigger said feature game.

8.   A gaming machine according to claim 6 or claim 7 wherein said attributes are accumulated at random.

9.   A gaming machine according to claim 6 or claim 7 wherein said attributes are accumulated in the event of said base game being played a predetermined number of times.

10.   A gaming machine according to claim 6 or claim 7 wherein said attributes are accumulated during play of said base game on the occurrence of predetermined combinations.

11.   A gaming machine according to any one of claims 7 to 10 wherein accumulated attributes that are used to trigger a feature game may be subsequently removed from a player's tally.

12.   A gaming machine according to claim 11 wherein said accumulated attributes are removed at random.

13.   A gaming machine according to claim 11 wherein said accumulated attributes are removed on the occurrence of a predetermined combination occurring during the play of said base game.

14.   A gaming machine according to any one of claims 6 to 11 wherein said accumulated attributes are removed in the event of said base game being played a predetermined number of times since the previous feature game was played.

15.   A gaming machine according to any one of claims 6 to 14 wherein the characteristics of said feature game are dependent on the accumulation of specific feature attributes.

16.   A gaming machine according to claim 15 wherein accumulation of said attributes will result in a player receiving free games.

17.   A gaming machine according to claim 15 wherein accumulation of said attributes will result in a player receiving win multipliers during free games.

18.   A gaming machine according to claim 15 wherein accumulation of said attributes will result in a player receiving win multipliers for specific combinations including wins with substitutes symbols appearing.

19. A gaming machine according to claim 15 wherein accumulation of said attributes will result in a player receiving bonus prizes.

20. A gaming machine according to claim 15 wherein accumulation of said attributes will result in a player receiving held reels.

5   21. A gaming machine according to claim 15 wherein accumulation of said attributes will result in a player receiving bonus reels.

22. A gaming machine according to claim 15 wherein accumulation of said attributes will result in a player receiving bonus scatter symbols.

23. A gaming machine according to claim 15 wherein accumulation of said attributes
10 will result in a player receiving bonus substitute symbols.

24. A gaming machine according to claim 15 wherein accumulation of said attributes will result in a player receiving bonus trigger combinations for further feature attributes.

25. A gaming machine including:

a base game of chance having random outcomes which include predetermined
15 winning outcomes, such that the machine pays winnings upon the occurrence of any of the winning outcomes; wherein said machine is further configured to provide a jackpot· feature game which can be triggered by a player upon the accumulation of a predetermined number of jackpot qualifying features. ·

26. A gaming machine according to any one of claims 25 wherein a player can
20 accumulate said jackpot qualifying features during play of said base game.

27. A gaming machine according to claim 26 wherein said jackpot features are accumulated at random.

28. A gaming machine according to claim 26 wherein said jackpot features are accumulated in the event of said base game being played a predetermined number of
25 times.

29. A gaming machine according to claim 26 wherein said jackpot features are accumulated during play of said base game on the occurrence of predetermined combinations.

30. A gaming machine according to any one of claims 25 to 29 wherein player interaction is required to determine if a jackpot prize is won.

31. A gaming machine according to claim 30 wherein a jackpot screen will appear for facilitating said player interaction when a player triggers a jackpot feature game.

32. A gaming machine according to any one of claims 25 to 31 wherein said jackpot can be contributed from a stand-alone machine.

33. A gaming machine according to any one of claims 25 to 31 wherein said jackpot can be contributed from a number of machines networked together.

34. A gaming machine according to any one of the preceding claims wherein said base game is a spinning reel type using a simulation of five adjacent wheels to present an array of randomly selected symbols in five columns and three rows.

35. A method of operating a gaming machine, the method including the steps of:
providing a base game of chance having random outcomes which include predetermined winning outcomes, paying winnings on the occurrence of any of the winning outcomes; and
providing a feature game which can be triggered by a player at any time of their choosing.

36. A method of operating a gaming machine, the method including the steps of:
providing a base game of chance having random outcomes which include predetermined winning outcomes, paying winnings on the occurrence of any of the winning outcomes; and
providing a feature game which can be triggered by a player at any time of their choosing during a specified time period defining a window of opportunity.

37. The method as claimed in claim 36 wherein said time period is triggered at random.

38. The method as claimed in claim 36 wherein said time period is triggered by a predetermined winning combination occurring during the play of said base game.

39. The method as claimed in any one of claims 36 to 38 wherein varying levels of said window of opportunity exist such that higher levels are perceived as returning increased winnings.

40. The method as claimed in any one of claims 36 to 39 wherein feature qualifying attributes are accumulated during play of said base game.

41. The method as claimed in claim 40 wherein accumulation of particular attributes will result in opening said window of opportunity such that a player may choose to trigger said feature game.

42. The method as claimed in claim 40 or claim 41 wherein said attributes are accumulated at random.

43. The method as claimed in claim 40 or claim 41 wherein said attributes are accumulated in the event of said base game being played a predetermined number of times.

44. The method as claimed in claim 40 or claim 41 wherein said attributes are accumulated during play of said base game on the occurrence of predetermined combinations.

45. The method as claimed in any one of claims 40 to 44 wherein accumulated attributes that are used to trigger a feature game may be subsequently removed from a player's tally.

46. The method as claimed in claim 45 wherein said accumulated attributes are removed at random.

47. The method as claimed in claim 45 wherein said accumulated attributes are removed on the occurrence of a predetermined combination occurring during the play of said base game.

48. The method as claimed in any one of claims 40 to 45 wherein said accumulated attributes are removed in the event of said base game being played a predetermined number of times since the previous feature game was played.

49. The method as claimed in any one of claims 40 to 48 wherein the characteristics of said feature game are dependent on the accumulation of specific feature attributes.

50. The method as claimed in claim 49 wherein accumulation of said attributes will result in a player receiving free games.

51. The method as claimed in claim 49 wherein accumulation of said attributes will result in a player receiving win multipliers during free games.

52. The method as claimed in claim 49 wherein accumulation of said attributes will result in a player receiving win multipliers for specific combinations including wins with substitutes symbols appearing.

53. The method as claimed in claim 49 wherein accumulation of said attributes will result in a player receiving bonus prizes.

54. The method as claimed in claim 49 wherein accumulation of said attributes will result in a player receiving held reels.

55. The method as claimed in claim 49 wherein accumulation of said attributes will result in a player receiving bonus reels.

56. The method as claimed in claim 49 wherein accumulation of said attributes will result in a player receiving bonus scatter symbols.

57. The method as claimed in claim 49 wherein accumulation of said attributes will result in a player receiving bonus substitute symbols.

58. The method as claimed in claim 49 wherein accumulation of said attributes will result in a player receiving bonus trigger combinations for further feature attributes.

59. A method of operating a gaming machine, the method including the steps of:

providing a base game of chance having random outcomes which include predetermined winning outcomes, paying winnings on the occurrence of any of the winning outcomes; and

providing a jackpot feature game which can be triggered by a player upon the accumulation of a predetermined number of jackpot qualifying features.

60. The method as claimed in claim 59 wherein a player can accumulate said jackpot qualifying features during play of said base game.

61. The method as claimed in claim 60 wherein said jackpot features are accumulated at random.

62. The method as claimed in claim 60 wherein said jackpot features are accumulated in the event of said base game being played a predetermined number of times.

63. The method as claimed in claim 60 wherein said jackpot features are accumulated during play of said base game on the occurrence of predetermined combinations.

64. The method as claimed in any one of claims 59 to 63 wherein player interaction is required to determine if a jackpot prize is won.

65. The method as claimed in claim 64 wherein a secondary jackpot screen will appear for facilitating said player interaction when a player triggers a jackpot feature game.

66. The method as claimed in any one of claims 59 to 65 wherein said jackpot can be contributed from a stand-alone machine.

67. The method as claimed in any one of claims 59 to 65 wherein said jackpot can be contributed from a number of machines networked together.

68. The method as claimed in any one of claims 35 to 67 wherein said base game is a spinning reel type using a simulation of five adjacent wheels to present an array of randomly selected symbols in five columns and three rows.

69. A gaming machine substantially as herein described with reference to any one of the embodiments of the invention illustrated in the accompanying drawings and/or examples.

70. A method of operating a gaming machine substantially as herein described with reference to any one of the embodiments of the invention illustrated in the accompanying drawings and/or examples.

DATED this 20th day of April 2004

5   BALDWIN SHELSTON WATERS
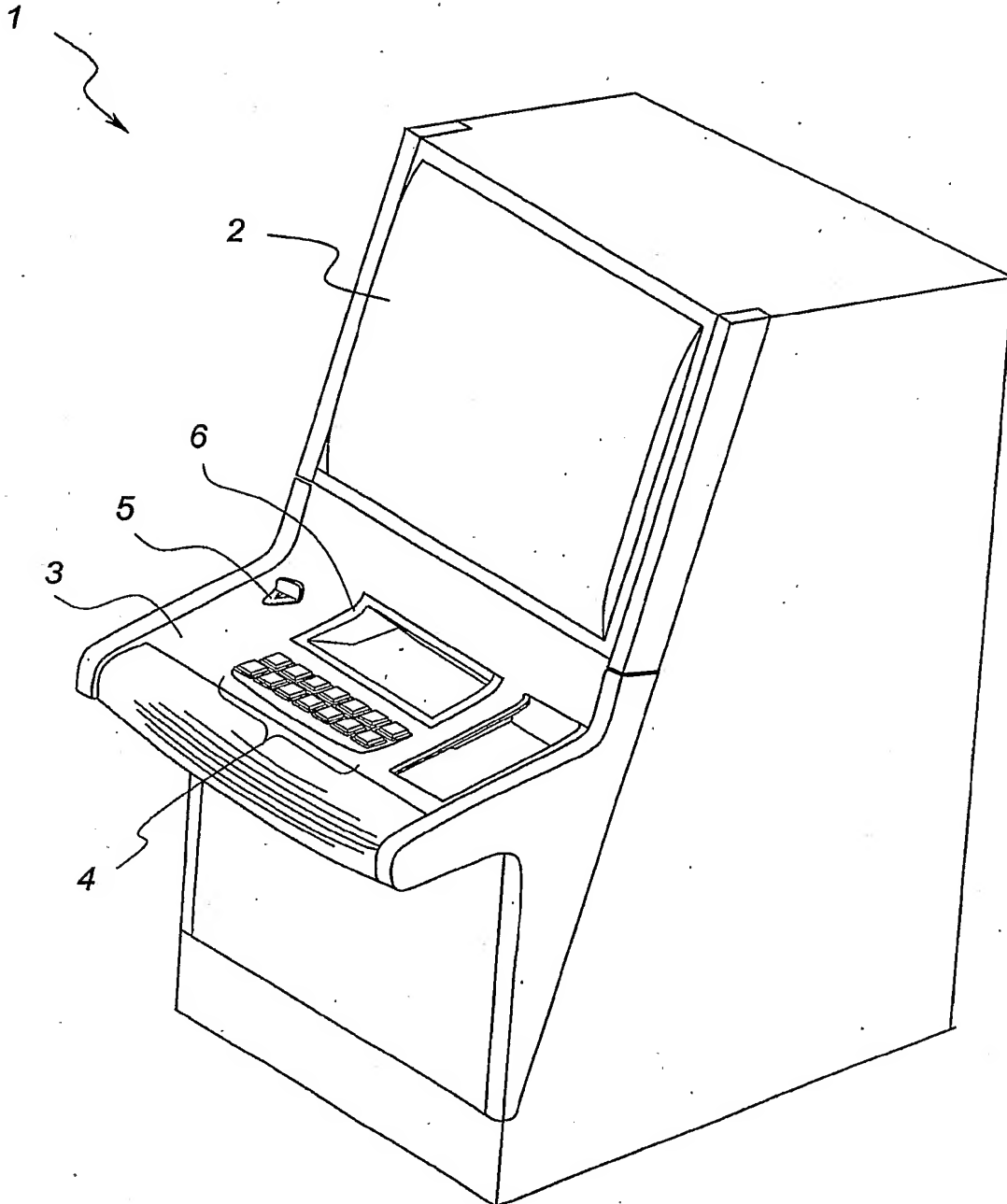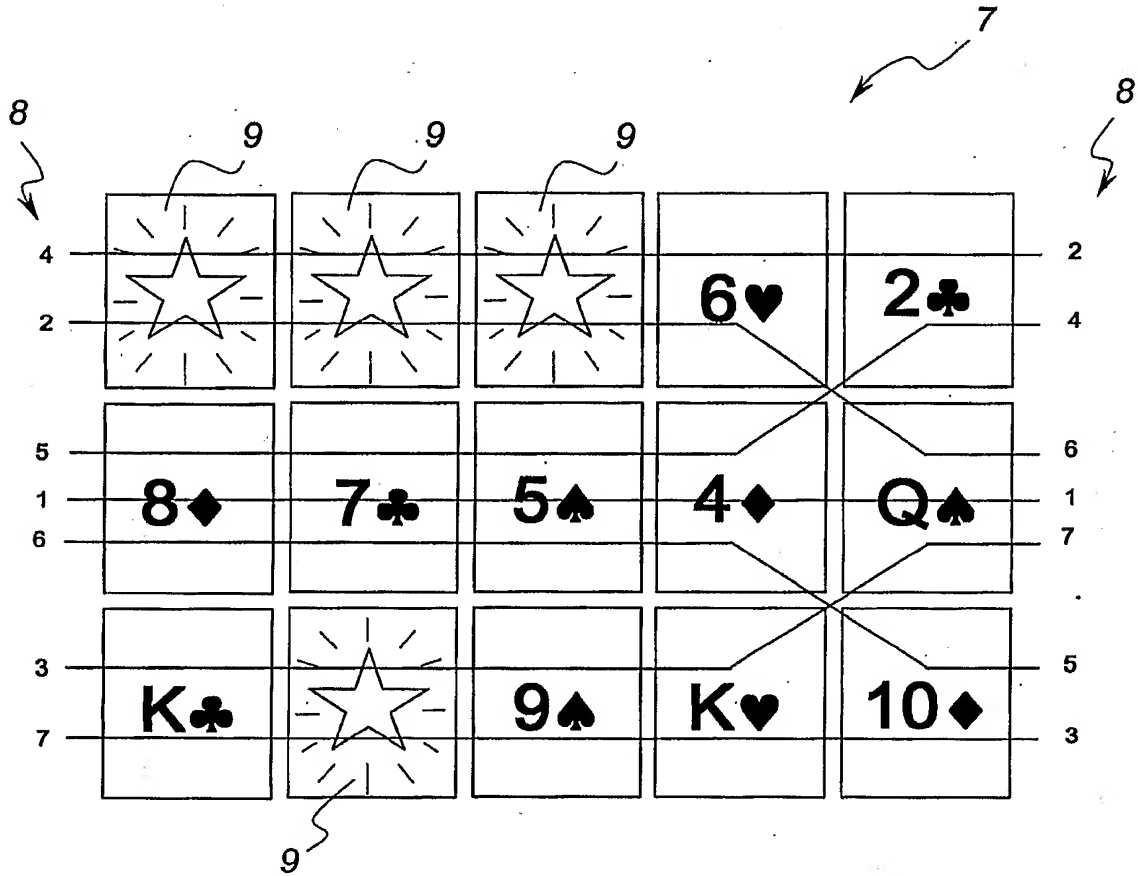
Attorneys for: AINSWORTH GAME TECHNOLOGY LIMITED

Fig. 1

Fig. 2